



A NEW STANCE ON DIETARY CHOLESTEROL

What You Need to Know

In the past, you may have read or even heard from your doctor to limit your dietary cholesterol. That advice is now changing. In the U.S. government's 2015-2020 "New Dietary Guidelines for Americans" the limit on cholesterol has been removed. Previously, American adults were advised to limit cholesterol in their diet to 300 milligrams a day, which is the equivalent of two eggs.

WHY HAS THE LIMIT BEEN REMOVED?

A good amount of scientific research suggests that there isn't a strong connection between dietary cholesterol and blood cholesterol. In fact, the cholesterol in your diet is only responsible for a small fraction of your total blood cholesterol. Your body naturally produces most cholesterol on its own. Other factors that contribute to blood cholesterol levels include smoking, obesity, physical activity, age, family history and even certain medications. So, all of these elements must be taken into account when it comes to maintaining healthy blood cholesterol.

DOES THIS MEAN I CAN EAT WHATEVER I WANT?!

No, of course not! The New Dietary Guidelines stress moderation and advise that individuals should still aim to limit or avoid saturated fats and trans fats (i.e., fatty meats, fast food and high-fat dairy products). Research shows that your liver produces more cholesterol when you eat a diet high in saturated and trans fats. Foods like eggs, shrimp and lobster are high in cholesterol, but not high in saturated fat—so as long as you are eating in moderation, these types of foods shouldn't negatively impact your blood cholesterol.

Experts recommend that adults get their blood cholesterol tested at least once every four to six years. Talk to your doctor about your cholesterol level and follow their recommendations.

WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that helps your body make hormones, vitamin D, and substances that help you digest foods. Your body, and especially your liver, makes all the cholesterol you need and circulates it through the blood.

A CLOSER LOOK AT CHOLESTEROL

When your blood cholesterol is tested, you will see a total cholesterol reading, as well as individual readouts on the following:

LDL Cholesterol

LDL cholesterol is considered the “bad” cholesterol because it contributes to plaque, which is a thick, hard deposit that can clog arteries and make them less flexible.

Ideally, you want your LDL less than 100 mg/dL. An LDL above 190 is considered very high.

HDL Cholesterol

HDL is considered “good” cholesterol because it helps remove LDL cholesterol from the arteries. An HDL 60 mg/dL is considered to be protective against heart disease. Anything lower than 40 puts you at an increased risk of heart disease.

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are another type of fat, and they’re used to store excess energy from your diet. High levels of triglycerides in the blood are associated with atherosclerosis. A triglyceride reading of below 150 is considered ideal.

HOW TO LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL

1. **Choose healthier fats.** Saturated fats, found primarily in red meat and dairy products, raise your total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, the “bad” cholesterol. Choose leaner cuts of meat, low-fat dairy and monounsaturated fats — found in olive and canola oils — for healthier options.
2. **Exercise.** Moderate physical activity can help raise high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, the “good” cholesterol. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise (like brisk walking) a day.
3. **Quit smoking.** If you smoke, stop. Quitting might improve your HDL cholesterol level. And the benefits don’t end there of course.
4. **Lose weight if you’re overweight.** Carrying even a few extra pounds contributes to high cholesterol. Losing as little as 5 to 10 percent of your weight can improve cholesterol levels.
5. **Drink alcohol only in moderation.** If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. For healthy adults, that means up to one drink a day for women of all ages and men older than age 65, and up to two drinks a day for men age 65 and younger.

